

Breaking Loose:



Mutual Acquiescence or Mutual Aid?

Ron Sakolsky

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MUTUAL ACQUIESCENCE
OR
MUTUAL AID?

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the Sla-dai-aich (Inner Island) anarchists from whom I have learned so much about freedom and community, and who constantly inspire me with their adventurous spirit and the vibrancy with which they live their lives.

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— Michael Lundberg

PREFACE

The story of this book starts with the coining of the term “mutual acquiescence.” It first appeared as part of a single sentence in a 2006 thought piece that I wrote for *Green Anarchy* magazine under the title of “Why Misery Loves Company” in which I stated: “What I call mutual acquiescence is the polar opposite of the anarchist concept of mutual aid in that it paralyzes revolt rather than facilitating it.”

After this concept of mutual acquiescence had been percolating in my mind for about five years, I expanded upon the idea in a paper written for the Second Annual North American Anarchist Studies Network (NAASN) Conference in January of 2011. However, the resulting essay, “Mutual Acquiescence,” was never meant to stay in the academic ghetto, and I refused an offer to have it published in that context. So when Jason McQuinn asked me to contribute an article to the first issue of his new magazine, *Modern Slavery*, I agreed to rework the NAASN paper into an article entitled “Mutual Acquiescence or Mutual Aid?,” which was published in 2012. Yet no sooner had the *Modern Slavery* version been published than it became apparent to me that the idea of mutual acquiescence was one with which I was not yet finished. As I increasingly started to see the contemporary quandary of anarchy through the lens of mutual acquiescence, the present book took shape.

To be clear from the start, I did not create the term mutual acquiescence as part of a doom and gloom scenario of despair in which misery rules our lives, but as a way of understanding why and how people become

immersed in the dead end of believing that misery is the only reality. The latter “realistic” state of mind is what surrealists call miserabilism. I see the relevance of the concept of mutual acquiescence here as bringing the historical connection between surrealism and anarchy into the present moment. For my part, the operative idea was that if we could understand the contemporary phenomenon of mutual acquiescence, we could begin to figure out how to transform its socially ingrained relationships of subservience into vibrant ones of mutual aid. I had no illusions that accomplishing such a task would be an easy one in practice, but assumed that the crossroads of mutual acquiescence and mutual aid would offer us a place to start in that journey toward anarchy.

Around the time that the *Modern Slavery* article was picked up and published online by the Anarchist Library, I had already begun to consider mutual acquiescence to be a pivotal idea in my thinking and considered that perhaps it might also find a useful place in anarchist theory as a whole. It appeared to me first as a potential chapter in another book on which I am currently working which has as its subject the historical intersection of anarchy and surrealism. As I re-conceptualized and rewrote the piece over time, it quickly morphed into its own book project. I began to realize that rather than it being a chapter in a larger book, I had actually been writing two books simultaneously. The book on the historical intersection of anarchy and surrealism would have to wait its turn. The more immediate project was not a book on the anarchist history of surrealism, but rather one in which anarcho-surrealism was used theoretically as a

contemporary form of analysis.

The idea of mutual acquiescence demanded a book of its own. However, I did not want the title to inadvertently lead to the depressing conclusion that mutual acquiescence made the realization of anarchy impossible. Instead, it needed a dynamic title that would make it clear that in order for the flowing waters of mutual aid to run freely, the dam of mutual acquiescence must be destroyed. Rather than simply blaming all of our woes on the state or capitalism, we can begin the processes of individual and social transformation by understanding the toxic nature of the everyday social relationships that prevent us from breaking loose.

If there is any subtext to this book, written in between the lines is the idea that we all hold a piece of the puzzle called anarchy. In so saying, I do not mean to oversimplify the profoundly complex differences between anarchist ideas from individualist to communitarian ones and from those which prize negation to those that emphasize affirmation. Rather, it is my contention that we need to recognize anarchy as a mosaic rich with diversity and not let any of the internal theoretical contradictions therein make us forget what we have in common. Together in mutual aid and as individuals in revolt, we can take back our lives. We can break loose from the dead weight of mutual acquiescence and set sail for the beckoning shores of anarchy.

Ron Sakolsky



— Matta

Most of us have made a compact, saying "Let us make a convention. Let us agree to call what we are feeling not 'pain' but 'neutral;' not 'dull unease' but 'well enough,' not 'restless dissatisfaction intermitted by blowing up,' but average 'hanging around.' Our consensus is that how we live is tolerable. If I ask, 'How are you?' you must say, 'Pretty good.' And if I do not remind you, you must not remind me. To all this we swear.

Paul Goodman

The hugger-mugger totality wants nothing and does nothing. They are entangled with one another, do not move, prisoners; they abandon themselves to opaque pressures but they themselves are the power that lies upon them and binds them, mind and limb.

Robert Walser

What I have termed *mutual acquiescence* is the social adhesive that cements the bricks of alienation and oppression which structure our daily lives into a wall of domination known as consensus reality. Mutual acquiescence is a major obstacle to the practice of what anarchists refer to as mutual aid, in that the latter is concerned with providing the cooperative means for vaulting that wall. While cooperation can take many forms, for classical anarchist philosopher Pyotr Kropotkin, who developed the evolutionary theory of mutual aid in relation to human behavior, its

quintessence in the political realm is anarchy (Kropotkin, 1902/1955). With that in mind, I will take the liberty here of referring to the concept of mutual aid only in the fullest anarchist sense and will consider those cooperative human relationships associated with welfare state capitalism and state socialism as being built upon forms of mutual acquiescence because of their implicit or explicit statist assumptions that run counter to anarchy.

Even in its least cooperative and most authoritarian forms, mutual acquiescence cannot simply be equated with unmediated mass conformity to societal norms. Mutual acquiescence is instead composed of a paralyzing web of intermediary social relationships, which are the scaffolding of that conformity. What makes mutual acquiescence so insidious is that it is a form of social control that is rooted in the everyday relationships that compose the lived experience of domination. Therefore, an analysis of how mutual acquiescence prevents and immobilizes individual and collective forms of direct action allows for a more nuanced model of domination and resistance than can be afforded by merely referencing the devastating effects of authority imposed from above. When acquiescence to the latter impositions are considered without addressing the role of social mediation from below, we are only seeing part of the picture.

Beyond the compliant nature of the specific behaviors associated with it, mutual acquiescence does have a relational context that is linked to the existence of the State and is mirrored by the economy. According to the Tiqqun collective,

The more societies constitute themselves

in States, the more their subjects embody the economy. They monitor themselves and each other; they control their emotions, their movements, their inclinations and believe that they can expect the same self-control from others. They link up, put themselves in chains and chain themselves to each other, countering any type of excess (Tiqun, 2010, p. 85).

Such collusive relationships of self-enslavement are based on relinquishing our potential power as individuals and autonomous collectivities and so are at the core of mutual acquiescence.

Like the relationships of empowered solidarity that animate mutual aid, disempowering relationships of mutual acquiescence are complex. Taken together in practice, both compose an individual's ensemble of social relationships. Moreover, they are impacted by social constructions of class, ethnicity, race, and gender. As an example, a family that one is born into can be characterized by relationships of mutual acquiescence, but these can crisscross with a primary or secondary affiliation that a family member has with an anarchist affinity group in such a way that the relationships of one may modify or detract from the other. Alternatively, family ethnicity and political affinity can reinforce one another, as was the case with the German, Jewish, and Italian anarchist groups that flourished in the US in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet, even in the latter historical case, the egalitarian relationships of mutual aid still might have possibly been undermined by the hierarchical practices associated with patriarchal domination or reinforced by the lack of them. Just as

the individual balance between relationships based upon mutual acquiescence and those associated with mutual aid can shift and is not necessarily fixed over the course of one's lifetime, anarchism itself is always in the process of becoming.

Emphasizing this sense of fluidity, Gustav Landauer conceived of not only anarchy, but the State as a living organism. By postulating that the State is based upon lived social relationships, he explained how it might be deposed. It is in this sense that he found common ground with Max Stirner in conceptualizing the State as a "spook." Landauer's early writings were very much influenced by Stirner. Even in his later anarcho-socialist writings, Landauer sought to find common ground between communitarian anarchism and egoism rather than viewing them as being at war with one another. With this in mind, he was not arguing against individualism, but in opposition to what he viewed as an atomistic form of individualism. Rather than simply defending an unproblematic collectivism and dismissing egoism out of hand, Landauer juxtaposed his predilection for the poetry of revolt to the cold "scientific swindle" of the Marxist ideologues, whose differences with industrial capitalism were not fundamental. In so doing, he stressed the uniqueness of each individual in an organic social context. To Landauer's way of thinking, while the individual is connected to the larger social whole of which he is a vital part, she is not considered to be subordinate to it. In Paul Cudenec's book, *The Anarchist Revelation*, which draws heavily on the work of Landauer, the human tensions between the individual and the collective are

overridden by their complementarity in an anarchist context. In this regard, Cudenec concludes, “The point is that individual self-realization and collective solidarity are two aspects of the same thing. The lack of either one leads to the loss of the other” (Cudenec, 2013, p. vii).

For Landauer, the strength of the group was not to be judged by mass conformity to group norms, but by the diversity of its human elements. Rather than the atomistic individual, it was the unique personalities within a group context that were to be prized and deemed essential to anarchy. In this sense, Landauer’s approach offers a social context for Stirner’s egoism that is compatible with both individualist and communitarian forms of anarchy. The idea that ideological “spooks” can simply be made to lose their power by refusing to believe in them is an oversimplification of Stirner’s thinking on the subject. As Lupus Dragonowl explains, “While it is true that Stirner believes that spectres lose their normative force when we disbelieve in them, we can also be oppressed by other people who continue to believe in and act on spectres” (Dragonowl, 2015, p.38). The oppressive process that Dragonowl is identifying here is fueled by mutual acquiescence. With this nuanced understanding in mind, according to his biographer Eugene Lunn, “Landauer felt that he had demonstrated that self-reliant individualism and social commitment were not irreconcilable, that anarchism and socialism were, in fact, interdependent” (Lunn, 1973, p. 110).

In Landauer’s thinking, the goal was the cultivation of a diverse community of individuals rather than an acceptance of the homogenizing imposition of state socialism. In Landauer’s words, “People do not

live in the state. The state lives in the people” (Landauer, 1911/2010, p. 249). For Landauer then, both the State and capital exist as relations between people. In this sense, “The state is a social relationship, a certain way of people relating to one another. It can be destroyed by creating new social relationships, i.e. by people relating to one another differently” (Landauer, 1910/2010, p. 214). Kropotkin’s concept of mutual aid is just such a way of “relating to one another differently.” Using the latter’s terminology, Landauer envisioned the antidote to the “passivity,” “compliance,” and “indifference” that he decried as being found in the development of “a spirit of mutual aid” (Landauer, 1912/2010, p. 227). He had earlier elaborated on this spirit elsewhere as being characterized by “peoples uniting in freedom” (Landauer, 1909/2010, p. 195).

Such an invigorating spirit of collective transformation through mutual aid can be contrasted with what Kropotkin delineated as the debilitating “spirit of voluntary servitude that is cleverly cultivated in the minds of the young in order to perpetuate the subjection of the individual to the State” (Kropotkin, 1898/1987, p. 155). Similarly, in *God and the State* (1870), Michael Bakunin says,

The immense majority of individuals doubtlessly believe that they think for themselves, but they are only *slavishly* repeating by rote, with slight modifications, the thoughts and aims of the other conformists which they imperceptibly absorb. This *servility*, this routine, this perennial *absence of the will to revolt* and this lack of initiative and independence of thought are

the principle causes for the slow, desolate historical development of humanity [*italics mine*] (Bakunin in Dolgoff, 1871/1981, p. 236).

Voluntary Servitude

Historically speaking, Saul Newman traces the theory of voluntary servitude back to its origins in the sixteenth century formulations of Étienne de La Boétie in order to explain the ways in which an internalized propensity for self domination can thwart the creation of a radical subjectivity (Newman, 2010). Yet Newman fails to mention Kropotkin's explicit use of the term "voluntary servitude" and Bakunin's meditation on the "absence of the will to revolt," and so misses an opportunity to link the concept of voluntary servitude to the classical anarchist tradition through the influence of La Boétie on both Bakunin and Kropotkin, and of all three on Landauer's idea of the state as a social relationship. In reincorporating voluntary servitude into anarchist theory, while at the same time bypassing the thinking of Kropotkin and Bakunin on the subject, Newman obscures the way in which voluntary servitude can inform, and be informed by, the theory of mutual aid.

In his 2010 discourse on voluntary servitude, Newman used the term "active acquiescence" in his exploration of the micropolitics of submission. However, he never pursued its theoretical implications in relation to the *mutuality* of that acquiescence. As a radical counterpoint to the concept of voluntary servitude, he used the rather unwieldy post-anarchist term, "involuntary servitude." I have always preferred instead to employ the already existing, widely used,

and more expansive term, mutual aid in that capacity because it points to an alternative that does not deny, but is not limited to, the will of the individual (Sakolsky, 2006/2009, p. 25). This usage is not meant to pretend that even the exercise of mutual aid cannot sometimes inadvertently lend itself to the creation of new forms of voluntary servitude, particularly in a mass movement context. Like all anarchist organizational forms, mutual aid requires constant vigilance to prevent its degradation, abuse, or corruption into a groupthink mentality. Using the term mutual acquiescence simply acknowledges that voluntary servitude has a social context.

From a surrealist point of view, voluntary servitude is a manifestation of miserabilism. In the surrealist lexicon, the term miserabilism refers to both the system that produces misery and the idea that misery is the only possible reality. Miserabilism thrives on fear, not only the fear of repression, but the fear of freedom. Fear and voluntary servitude go hand in hand, though not as simple cause and effect. Not only are the societal conditions that foster voluntary servitude imposed on each individual from above, they are socially reinforced from below by what surrealist Louis Aragon referred to in his experimental 1926 novel, *Paris Peasant*, as “the principles of why-not and making-the-best-of-it” (Aragon, 1926/1994, p. 67). Such disempowering principles embody the debilitating voices of complacency that are constantly engaged in the shoulder-shrugging process of producing mutual acquiescence. In this miserabilist sense, mutual acquiescence is the social dimension of voluntary servitude. While mutual acquiescence concerns itself

with exploring how the submission process works socially, what Newman has alternately called “active” or “willful” acquiescence focuses on individual responsibility alone. It is my contention that both the individual and social perspectives are essential to fully understanding the puzzle of submission.

As the term consensus reality implies, the concept of reality is based on a participatory acceptance of the relationships of domination embedded in the status quo which then predisposes us to collude in our own oppression. It is in this sense that Paul Cudenec employs the revealing term “capitalist *con*-sensus” (Cudenec, 2013, p. 56). It is not an anarchist form of consensus based on an anti-hierarchical approach to decision-making in the context of mutual aid, but a consensus mired in resignation. It is this sense of resignation implied by voluntary servitude that was at the heart of the impassioned statement by individualist anarchist Albert Libertad, who wrote in 1905: “I hate the resigned!” (Libertad in Stone, “Le Voyeur,” 2014, p. 83). Similarly, fellow individualist Émile Armand considered anyone who submissively cooperated with the system of domination and exploitation to be “as much an ‘accomplice’ as a victim” (Armand in Stone, “Le Voyeur,” 2014, p. 111). In his 1911 “Manual of the Individualist Anarchist” article, he attributed “human servility above all to the defective mentality of men taken as a bloc. There are only masters because there are slaves, and the gods only remain because the faithful kneel” (Armand, 1911/2012, p.13).

Individualist George Darien went so far as to say, “The unfortunate are not so in spite of

themselves. They are so because they want to be so. They have willingly placed their neck under the yoke and they prefer not to remove it” (Darien in Stone, “Le Voyeur”, 2014, p. 44). In this analysis, voluntary servitude illuminates a key psychological obstacle to be overcome if freedom is to be attained and so enhances our understanding of the relationship between freedom and individual choice. Yet there is a fine line between the concept of voluntary servitude and the practice of blaming the victim. Undaunted by the social complexities of choice, Darien went on to locate voluntary servitude in the context of what to him was a seemingly inexplicable respect for the very same institutionalized conventions that oppress those who are victimized. However, the inexplicable can become more explicable with reference to the concept of mutual acquiescence.

Raymond Callamin, an illegalist sentenced to death because of his association with the notorious Bonnot gang of anarchist bankrobbers in the early years of the twentieth century, railed against those who were faint-hearted when it came to revolt. In his trial statement for bank robbery, he postulated that “if among them there are some who leave the flock, the others hold them back, either directly or indirectly” (Callamin in Stone, “Le Voyeur,” 2014, p. 105). Such a statement is in full accord with the concept of mutual acquiescence. From the perspective of mutual acquiescence, we can see that if everyone around you has her neck in a yoke, not only is the yoke normalized, but typically those so yoked accept it as their reality and so they “realistically” expect others to do so as well, either out of desperation, for

their own sense of security, or even out of fear for their own sanity.

In more recent years, a peculiar version of this self-yoking has been in evidence in the anarchist milieu in relation to internal power struggles that involve a miserabilist type of “identity politics” rooted in victimhood but invoked in the context of liberation. As Lupus Dragonowl has explained,

Identity Politicians (IPs) celebrate their current blockages, internalize their cage, and insist that the cage is both inescapable *and* revolutionary. This is not a perspective of escape— it is a perspective of entrapment in the guise of solidarity.” (Dragonowl, p.45).

Recognizing the complexity of its manifestations, mutual acquiescence can be understood as a socially lived experience in which one’s peers, however inadvertently, act to reinforce the notion that misery is the only possible reality and so promulgate a shared psychological state that lubricates the wheels on the mental treadmill of submission. While not discounting the harsh realities of the more tangible forms of oppression/repression meted out from above, my contention here is that such forms of domination are aided and abetted by miserabilist relationships of mutual acquiescence that can include identifying with victimhood in an unproblematic way because wielding it as a weapon of guilt seems to promise an increased level of empowerment.

In essence, the overall idea of mutual acquiescence fleshes out Callumin’s unformulated “indirect” way in which people are “held back.” In

other words, the relationship between the individual and the system of domination is complicated by the fact that humans are sociable beings, most of whom desire some degree of social acceptance. Accordingly, they respond submissively not only to the stick, but to the carrot of social approval. In the context of mutual acquiescence, the carrot is the stick by other means. The contemporary system of domination is characterized not only by the outright humiliation and degradation involved in an acceptance of such miserabilist social roles as citizen, wage slave, and consumer; but by the nightsticks, armored tanks, and drones of an increasingly invasive policing of minds and bodies; and by the carrots of social acceptance awarded for conformity that feed the tapeworm of mutual acquiescence. For many, the travesties of submission are made more palatable by the feel-good democratic language of electoral politics, team participation at the workplace, or the unending procession of shiny new gadgets to keep us amused and distracted as they simultaneously increase the possibilities for monitoring our thoughts and behavior.

But wait, according to the Institute of Precarious Consciousness, misery is no longer the dominant affect of capitalism. It was replaced in the post-World War II period by boredom, and, in “post-modern” times, by anxiety. As they see it, it is the latter which is currently the conditioner of obedience. They contend that the dominant affect of anxiety typically manifests itself as precarity. In their analysis, “Precarity is a type of insecurity that treats people as disposable so as to impose control” (IPC Pamphlet, 2014, p. 5). In arguing against counteracting human misery with the surrealist antidote

of poetic adventure, anarchist cultural historian Jesse Cohn contends that such an approach is inappropriate because it would only exacerbate the anxiety associated with insecurity. In fact, he grants anxiety such paramount importance that he contends that the best strategy for those engaged in building resistance cultures today is to cautiously tiptoe around it in what he calls “a careful approach” (Cohn, 2014, p 392-3). In effect, he writes off the inspirational power of the insurgent imagination and, in doing so, condemns humankind to a padded cell in the reality asylum. Alternatively, as Lev Zlodney and Jason Radegas see it,

It is time to wake up again into the dream.
Unlike land, unlike loved ones, relations, forests, health, customs, collectivities, imagination cannot be taken by force; it can only be surrendered, but at any moment, we can recover it. It is the tiny weapon smuggled into the prison, the bare minimum for plotting a grandiose escape” (Zlodney and Radegas, 2014, p.8).

These different approaches to addressing anxiety as a social phenomenon raise questions worth considering. Is miserabilism no longer a valid concept in understanding voluntary servitude, and if mutual acquiescence is now fueled more by anxiety than by misery, then is surrealism itself outdated? From a surrealist viewpoint, misery, boredom, and anxiety are merely the specific forms that miserabilism might take, and so they are all constantly in play and all are interrelated. Each might require its own strategies of subversion, but they cannot be fully separated from one another. In the IPC analysis, the historical surrealists

waged war against misery, while the situationists of the post-war period battled boredom, and now contemporary radicals must combat anxiety. Today, precarity might well be the most prominent affective face of domination. However, because it thrives on an acceptance of the idea that a life of anxiety is the only possible reality, from a surrealist point of view, it produces consequences that are miserabilist in effect. Moreover, while it might be true that the contemporary capitalist state/state capitalism has, in certain ways and for particular population demographics, reduced some of the concrete manifestations of misery and boredom, this shift has not been true across the board. At the same time, working/living conditions have become unbearable for many others in a manner that includes increased anxiety but is not limited to it. Misery has never truly disappeared, and the disparities associated with it are even greater in the Global South and among “illegal” immigrants to the Global North.

As once secure (if boring) jobs have increasingly become precarious, the stress associated with precarity reigns over us and reins us into our work/consumption harnesses. That some of these might be “designer” harnesses does not entirely eliminate the subservience involved and might even make it more insidious. However, the current misery-making matrix is not just based on anxiety, but is characterized by a lumpy combination of misery, boredom, and anxiety with all three being increasingly encased within a panopticon of surveillance. At work, some jobs involve more or less of one than the other, but all three tend to be present in most jobs to some degree and certainly in the job

market overall. One can be anxious about where one's next paycheck is coming from and be willing to take a boring and/or low-paying job temporarily to get by. Or, if one's financial back is up against the unemployment wall, one might even force oneself to put up with a miserable job situation. In this sense, anxiety can produce misery when the former is viewed as inevitable.

What then keeps people working under such inhospitable conditions? For some, the answer may be found outside the workplace. Being "unemployed" is typically perceived in negative terms as not only lacking a paycheck but an identity, rather than being seen in the liberating context of the abolition of work. The IPC examines the growth of a plethora of what they call "mediatized secondary identities" now available through the use of social media as one contemporary way that potential resistance is derailed and our reservations about the system sold back to us in the user-friendly form of personal growth. Facebook, websites, and blogs can be fertile ground for the establishment of impersonal relationships based on mutual acquiescence in which superficiality is encouraged and a show of untroubled acceptance of consensus reality is the order of the day. Of course, these same sites can be used to question the dominant discourse and even to organize against it, but any such questioning and organizing online is further mediated by an implicit technology of surveillance.

One of the most insidious techniques of manipulation used to insure subservience, particularly within the professional sectors of the contemporary workforce, is "motivational training." This organizational psychology approach is increasingly promoted

by “enlightened” management to create employee enthusiasm for investing not only their bodies and minds, but their “souls” in their work. Of course, there will still always be the “Mr. Block” type of unquestioning “wage slave.” The historical Mr. Block character, drawn by the Wobbly-cartoonist Ernest Riebe, was famous for his blockheaded loyalty to the employer. He is the classic poster child for voluntary servitude at the workplace because he is even willing to alienate himself from his fellow workers in order to bow to the demands of the bosses. Strikes, sabotage, and “slow down” are not part of his vocabulary (Riebe, 1984). However, beyond the scientific management heyday of Taylorism, employees are more often seduced into such subservience these days through the use of the latest human relations techniques.

The success of this workplace seduction involves not only the provision of managerial carrots, but the simultaneous exploitation of the social relationships of mutual acquiescence to encourage people to comply with workplace expectations. Guillaume Paoli explains the insidious way that current management practices work in his book, *Demotivational Training*. Using language that is resonant with both mutual acquiescence and voluntary servitude, he says, “In the horizontal system of servitude, Big Brother is other people. But he is also yourself depending on the situation” (Paoli, 2008/2014, p. 40). In the contemporary workplace, there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between the carrot and the stick involving the intersection of social and psychological forces in which managerial demands and peer social pressures are internalized and then combined into an

obedient employee mindset.

In this sense, power relations are seen as having many locations, including personal and social ones, rather than simply being limited to the mechanics of the top down chain of command model. In applying La Boétie's notion of voluntary servitude to the contemporary workplace, Paoli underscores the prior existence of hierarchical pressures in order to point out that even so-called *voluntary* servitude is not purely based on free choice. As he explains:

The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude does not elude the existence of constraints, it even presupposes it, and these constraints are omnipresent as threats. As a result, servitude is not voluntary in that it does not result from each individual's free choice, but it is also not simply the result of coercion alone. It is La Boétie's merit to have exposed this ambivalent middle course. It is not enough to account for authority, but it illuminates the reason for its perpetuation" (Paoli, 2008/2014, p. 136).

And I would add that if it is along the fault lines of this "ambivalent middle course" that the struggle for freedom lies, then mutual acquiescence must also be considered as a factor in inculcating the acceptance of servitude.

Paoli concludes that the antidote to voluntary slavery is disengagement, abstention, suspension of action, and self-determination. Taking this idea beyond the workplace, a classic ploy of land developers in the democratic form of the capitalist state is to get the people on whose land they would like to encroach

on their side by enticing them to engage with the development process. As a carrot, people are told that through engagement, they can get their concerns heard or that they can offer their expertise in mitigating any negative effects associated with a particular project, or that certain amenities will be granted to them as perks in what is promoted as a “win-win” situation. However, once that engagement occurs, the developer has already won because consent has been given either to the proprietarian ground rules for engagement or to those of the government agency set up to facilitate development through a regulatory process that is stacked in the developer’s favor. Such government agencies have typically been captured by the very interests that they are supposed to regulate, and the object of such regulation is usually some degree of cosmetic mitigation rather than the actual possibility of an outright rejection of the project in its entirety. Moreover, in those rare instances where a project is rejected, the developer is encouraged to reapply with a new proposal. Those in opposition are left to reconnoiter in the anticipation of next stage of the engagement process.

The only effective way to fight development is to break the engagement before it even begins. Refusal of the development project is predicated upon a rejection of engagement that is in turn based on a refusal of false hope. At a personal level, such disengagement is the first step in moving from the powerlessness of seeing oneself as part of an administered public to the active catharsis of individual and social revolt. When people disengage together, it can convert mutual acquiescence into mutual aid. But for many people, breaking up is hard

to do. Respectable fellow citizens and accommodating environmentalists may admonish them by pointing out that it is not polite or that it is unprofessional not to first exhaust all administrative remedies before throwing up a blockade. Liberals may actively discourage, or even attempt to prevent, radicals from taking direct action until the legalities of the engagement process have been completed, but by that time it is usually too late. Rather than the implied servitude of engagement, we can personally and collectively withdraw our consent from the miserabilist illusions of administrative legitimacy and its intrinsic belief in remedial mitigation, and construct unsubmitive relationships among ourselves instead.

Building upon Landauer, we can see that relationships that exemplify mutual acquiescence inhibit our ability to construct other relationships that might displace those upon which the State is built. Since the relationships that constitute and perpetuate the State are the negation of both individual revolt and social revolution, then the theoretical concept of mutual acquiescence might be the missing link in understanding how Stirner's egoism and Landauer's conditional notion of the State might fit together with La Boétie's idea of "voluntary servitude" and Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid. With this conjunction in mind, it becomes clear that we cannot simply replace or eliminate the State from above, but need to replace those relationships of mutual acquiescence that prevent our disengagement from it with ones involving mutual aid. As James Horrox has pointed out,

Landauer's analysis of state power
anticipated the central premise of Foucault's

governmentality thesis... his notion of capitalism and the state as sets of relations between subjects (discourse) rather than as ‘things’ that can be smashed (structures)” (Horrox in Jun and Wohl, 2009, p. 199).

In this Foucauldian sense, “biopower” is a capillary form of administered domination that subjugates bodies and controls populations by relying for its effectiveness on the generation of internalized authoritarian relationships of self-regulation.

The creation of such subservient relationships, which employ the discipline of both the carrot and the stick, in effect, dull our imaginations as part of the process of mental slavery. However, as surrealist Penelope Rosemont has insisted in her seminal piece on Landauer, discourses of control can be overturned by the imaginative power of desire that always takes unexpected paths in revolutionary situations. Such poetic discourses, inspired by what Landauer referred to as the “vagabondage of the imagination” appear in emancipatory moments with the “swiftness of dreams” in which everything seems possible. It is just such a “politics of joyous mythopoetic creation” capable of inspiring social outbreaks of surrealism in everyday life that animate what Stephen Shukaitis refers to as “imaginal machines” (Shukaitis, 2009, p. 100). As Rosemont further elaborates upon the prescient surreality of Landauer’s vision, “Landauer sought a total revolution—a leap beyond conventional limits not only in politics and economics, but also in culture, in the individual’s emotions, in the life of the mind” (P. Rosemont, 1982, p. 175). Like Stirner’s egoism,

surrealism is rooted in revolt, but, like Landauer's "poetic revolution," surrealism encompasses both an anticipatory utopian cultural politics and a concern with the creation of vibrant cultures of resistance in the here and now. In word and deed, it recognizes the relationship between individual revolt and social revolution.

Accordingly, Landauer's vision of what he called "structural renewal" was not predicated only on the dramatic circumstances of the revolutionary uprising. He prized the way in which the anarchist dream of liberty and community could manifest itself at the societal level in the construction of cultural alternatives founded upon what we would today call horizontality and autonomy and, at the personal level, in the formation of convivial relationships of reciprocity based upon a desire for directly experiencing the more expansive reality of anarchy denied to us by relationships of mutual acquiescence. While mutual acquiescence blocks the flow of mutual aid, relationships of mutual aid can in turn act as a catalytic agent in the dismantling of the conditioned social relationships of mutual acquiescence. Though his legacy as a theorist is often identified with the creation of prefigurative beachheads of social revolution, Landauer understood that the shedding of the constraints of mutual acquiescence can likewise occur in the heat of insurgency. Here his ideas can be linked to those of Stirner, whose insurrection of the sovereign individual can be similarly understood as prefigurative in its clarion call to act in the immediate present as if one were the free agent one desires to be.

In Landauer's conception,

The first step in the struggle of the oppressed

and suffering classes, as well as in the awakening of the rebellious spirit is always insurgency, outrage, a wild and raging sensation. If this is strong enough, realizations and action are directly connected to it; both actions of destruction and actions of creation” (Landauer, 1909/2010, p. 191).

Though Landauer opposed propaganda of the deed when it came to political assassinations, he understood that the insurrectionary upheaval of social war and the blossoming of the insurgent imagination went hand in hand. In speaking of the contemporary global justice movement, David Graeber adds direct action to the prefigurative lexicon.

In its essence direct action is the insistence, when faced with structures of unjust authority, on acting as if one is already free. One does not solicit the state. One does not even necessarily make a grand gesture of defiance. Insofar as one is capable, one proceeds as if the state does not exist (Graeber, 2009, p. 203).

More specifically, as AK Thompson has elaborated in relation to the enabling essence of “becoming” implicit in the black bloc tactic,

Rioting—despite being an essentially reactionary form of activity—allows its participants to concretely prefigure the society they want to create. This is so because the riot yields political subjects that are able to produce the world, subjects that—through the process of transformation the riot entails—are forced to confront the unwritten future within them (Thompson, 2010, p. 27).

In any event, whatever tactical differences might exist in a given situation in terms of violence and non-violence, or between the overt uprising as compared to the infrapolitics of everyday resistance, the transformative power of anarchist direct action is rooted in an intrinsic refusal of consent for the underlying hierarchical assumptions and abstractions held sacred by the dominant reality. Moving from the practice of mutual acquiescence to that of mutual aid is one concrete way in which such consent can be withdrawn and new relationships of solidarity and resistance constructed.

The question remains as to why certain individuals choose mutual acquiescence over mutual aid. To Landauer, even in relation to individual revolt, this is a question of social psychology. As he declared, “Stirner is a revolutionary because he is a social psychologist” (Landauer, 1907/2010, p. 112). This is because—as Landauer saw it—Stirner, in making his egoist argument for the revolt of the sovereign individual, might have logically offered a social explanation as to why so many choose not to revolt that would have taken his ideas beyond the Nietzschean notion of a herd mentality. Moreover, as one of the primary disseminators of the writing of La Boétie in Germany, Landauer was no stranger to the concept of voluntary servitude. In fact, his relational concept of the state is deeply rooted in it. However, as a communitarian anarchist, he placed voluntary servitude in a social context.

While some gifted individuals can imagine freedom even under the worst of circumstances, because of the prevalence of mutual acquiescence there is often a need for the social reinforcement of that desire for

freedom. From Landauer's viewpoint, more than the power of individual example was required for it to manifest itself fully. While Stirner prized insurrectionary revolt and Bakunin desired social revolution, Landauer emphasized freedom, which was underscored by his own appreciation of La Boétie's concept of voluntary servitude. Landauer did not desire to negate the importance of individualist anarchism, but rather to intellectually engage with it as an approach that offered an essential insight into the crippling self-coercion that La Boétie originally addressed as voluntary servitude. Similarly, I have attempted here to initiate a conversation between individualist and communitarian anarchism in relation to mutual acquiescence.

Unraveling The Individuality/ Mutuality Conundrum

To Bakunin the dynamic between mutual aid and individual liberty rests upon the idea that the freedom of one depends on the freedom of all or, as he would put it in his most widely circulated pronouncement: "Liberty without socialism is privilege, injustice; socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality" (Bakunin in Dolgoff, epigram, 1980). While Bakunin and Stirner are often seen as being at opposite ends of the anarchist spectrum, to Saul Newman what unites the thinking of the two is the idea that the liberty of others is not considered to be threatening, but "mutually resonating" and "mutually enhancing" (Newman, 2011, pp 20-24). It is in this sense that Bakunin wrote in relation to the Paris Commune of 1871, "The freedom of other men, far from negating or limiting

my freedom is, on the contrary, it's necessary premise and confirmation" (Bakunin, 1871/1980, p. 237). Still at issue between Bakunin and Stirner would be whether the freedom of others, though it might be "resonating" and "mutually enhancing," or even a "confirmation," would actually be a "necessary premise" for the freedom of the individual. In this regard Jean Weir bridges the gap between Bakunin and Stirner by reversing the terms in the question of "premises." Accordingly, she asks the rhetorical question: "If my freedom depends on the freedom of all, doesn't the freedom of all depend on my acting to free myself?" (Weir, 2000).

The usefulness of Stirner's idea of the "union of egoists" to this discussion rests upon its prizing of individual autonomy within groups of elective affinity. As Wolfi Landstreicher has noted in this regard,

We need to recognize our strength in each other, and put effort into each other for mutual strengthening, rather than offering charity to each other and nurturing weakness. This is where Stirner's union of egoists and Kropotkin's mutual aid come together (Landstreicher, undated pamphlet).

Though Stirner is often criticized for not elaborating further upon the exact nature of the union of egoists, more recently Massimo Passamani has provided a valuable approach to understanding the individual/group dynamic that might be involved.

According to Passamani, the union of egoists is animated by the practice of "mutual utilization." The latter term's decidedly unromantic description of mutuality is predicated upon each individual's

recognition and appreciation of the other individual based on the unique qualities and contributions that she can bring to a social relationship. Here the manipulative mass society of equally atomized individuals is replaced with the “equal inequality” of associative relations between unique individuals. In this sense, mutual utilization can be experienced as a fluid form of social interaction among unique individuals that is based on mutuality but which avoids both the debilitating effects of those interpersonal interactions of mutual acquiescence and the psychological passivity of *voluntary servitude*.

In elaborating upon the dynamic relationship between egoist associative unions and autonomous individuality, Passamani explains:

By associating, the particular individual doesn't renounce his own individuality, as occurs in society, but on the contrary, affirms it in its fullness... The individual who associates is no less an egoist than the one who prefers to 'stand alone.' If one had a more aware egoism, one would take into account that 'cooperation' is *more useful* than isolation (Passamani, 2012, pp 154-5).

For Passamani, such a cooperative relationship between unique individuals is not limited to engaging in constructive social pursuits, but can alternatively be a focal point for the negation of authority, creative acts of rebellion, and the fomentation of insurrectionary activity against those state and societal institutions that attempt to thwart one's ability to realize self ownership. In this regard John Moore has noted,

At a certain stage, the egoist realizes that she or he does not have the capacity to combat power on her/his own, but must link up with other egoists who are similarly seeking self-realization through free activity” (Moore, 2007, p. 67).

As Stirner himself once put it in response to his critics,

In competition everyone stands alone, but if competition disappeared because people see that cooperation is *more useful* than isolation, wouldn't everyone still be an egoist in association and seek *his own* advantage? (Stirner in Stirner, 2012, p. 80).

Stirner was not opposed to cooperative participation based on mutual self-interest. In this respect, he even proclaimed that he was “no enemy of socialism, nor in short any *actual interest*, not against socialists but against sacred socialists” (Stirner, 2012, pp 81–82). For Stirner, these “sacred socialists” were to be rejected not because of their socialist proclivities per se, but because they believed in collectivist ideological “spooks” that limited their appreciation of individuality.

Even iconoclastic individualist Renzo Novatore did not completely dismiss having any association with those in the anarcho-communist camp out of hand. As he wrote,

Yes we anarchist individualists are for Social Revolution, but in our way, it's understood. We will enter into the revolution for an exclusive need of our own to set fire to and incite spirits[...] The new society established, we will return to its margins to live our lives

dangerously[...] in eternal revolt (Novatore, 2012, pp.76-77).

Even for a revolutionary, the revolution must be understood as a continuously challenging and ongoing process with both individual and social dimensions rather than as a singular event. As Bakunin noted in his aforementioned essay on the Paris Commune, “The revolt of the individual against society is much more difficult than revolt against the State” (Bakunin, 1980, p.240). A corollary might be that one form of struggle does not resolve or preclude the other.

In a similarly ecumenical vein, Peter Lamborn Wilson has pointed out that anarcho-individualist Frank Brand (Enrico Arrigoni) went so far as to state,

Stirner’s individualist anarchism is in no way incompatible with anarcho-communism—nor even anarcho-syndicalism... If people would come together... in a voluntary way in a union of egoists to produce goods and services they need, would this not be anarcho-communism? (Wilson/Brand in V.A. *Enemies of Society*, 2011, p. 298).

While this might be considered an overstatement in downplaying what are very significant theoretical differences between individualist anarchism, anarcho-communism, and anarcho-syndicalism, Brand was not a theorist but rather a practitioner of anarchy informed by all three tendencies. As such, in his lived experience, he found no petrifying contradiction between these diverse approaches to anarchism. Moreover, we can safely assume that he was not alone in this regard. While theorists may argue about purity, those on the barricades often draw

inspiration from a wide variety of anarchist sources and typically do not have the luxury or the inclination to split hairs.

Where then is the place of Stirner's egoism on the communitarian/libertarian continuum? For Saul Newman, it does not have a single location, but has a more broad-based presence. As he explains,

If Stirner's thinking could take on a distinct political form, it would be as a politics of autonomy in which struggles are engaged in directly by people themselves rather than through representatives, and in which people, whether individually or in groups, freely determine for themselves their own practices, relations, and ways of living outside the control of centralized institutions" (Newman, 2011, p. 9).

Such a polyphonic approach to autonomy is compatible with an individual rejection of dominant social institutions along with the underlying conformist social premises and pressures that are associated with mutual acquiescence.

Moreover, it implies a willingness to become involved with those forms of mutual aid that affirm one's individuality. In so doing, a person comes face to face with the distortions of reality that occur with reification by which an abstraction (like "the nation") is treated as if it had an actual existence so that we may confuse relations of individual volition with ones of voluntary submission (like volunteering for the army for patriotic reasons). As Jason McQuinn elaborates on the dilemma of reification,

When it becomes habitual through repeated ob-

sessive-compulsive or compulsory-submissive behavior—and no longer consciously purposeful, reified forms of recognition can be mistaken for fully-attentive recognition, and this can lead people to begin believing that the reifications are more “real” than the evidence of their own senses—especially when forms of reification are reinforced by large-scale institutional systems of ideology, coercion, exploitation, and enslavement”(McQuinn, 2014, p.40).

In a hierarchical society, the crosshatching relationships of mutual acquiescence embedded in each of these top-down regimes of reinforcement are the social glue that keeps them in place from below.

On the Barricades

For many people, there is a cold comfort contained in mutual acquiescence precisely because it is experienced as a familiar, even tolerable social relationship, the social acceptability of which is keyed to an underlying desire for alignment within the parameters of what is considered by the dominant ideology to be legitimate protest. This reactionary ideology is in turn reiterated ad nauseam by the mass media in spectacular form and enforced by a nagging fear of state repression. In a political climate characterized by widespread feelings of powerlessness, mutual acquiescence is rooted in the social denial of our ability to mount radical opposition. Therefore, in an estranged way, it allows us to experience psychological relief in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds, and this is not only true for those who do not involve themselves in resistance, but even for

many who actively engage in resistance or protest.

As an example of the latter, a mutual acquiescence dynamic can be gleaned from the widely circulated left-liberal explanation for the unrestrained actions of the black bloc at the 2010 Toronto G20 summit. This explanation attributed the largely unimpeded black bloc property destruction spree not to the ability of direct actionists to outmaneuver the police, but, instead to police agents provocateur who allowed or even provoked the bloc to run amok in order to discredit the protest and justify the government's billion dollar security budget for the event. Of course, there is no way of fully knowing for certain what actually happened that day in terms of surreptitious police activities. However, the Vancouver Media Co-op published a firsthand critique of the widely circulated social democratic conspiracy theory version of events that seems congruent with the concept of mutual acquiescence.

According to Zig Zag,

Liberal reformists do not believe that the state can be fought through militancy... when militants carry out an effective attack, especially against such a massive security operation, it shatters the defeatist premise upon which reformism is based. The liberal response to such attacks is that they must be part of a 'greater conspiracy' (ZigZag, 2010, p. 2).

Putting that analysis in the insurrectionary anarchist context of global civil war, rather than a convoluted understanding of the image of flaming cop cars in Toronto being construed as evidence of the omnipotence of the police, we might instead recognize it as what

A.G. Schwarz has termed, with reference to the Greek insurrection of December 2008, a “signal of disorder” (Schwarz in Schwarz et al, 2010, p. 221). In this more empowering analysis, such intentionally unsettling gestures of “performative violence” as the burning of a cop car are seen as ways of breaking the spell of authority and so creating a ripple effect in spreading revolt because they fuel the notion that “anything is possible” (Papadimitropoulos in Schwarz et al, 2010, p. 71).

In contrast, the aforementioned conspiratorial explanation of events in Toronto by the liberal left can be seen as evidence that mutual acquiescence is so deeply inculcated in authoritarian society that not even protesters are immune from its mental fetters, especially if they are demanding reforms from the global corporate state rather than seeking its dissolution. Some Toronto G20 protest leaders among the social democrats of the left simply dismissed the results of such black bloc militancy in conspiratorial terms. Others, in hindsight, even went so far as to publicly suggest that the police should have preemptively arrested those engaging in the black bloc tactic before the march had even begun so as to separate the good demonstrators from those bad apples who were willing to directly challenge the State’s control of the streets and yet strangely, from the liberal leftist point of view, make no demands of it.

On the other hand, as A.G. Schwarz has noted, It is oxymoronic to make demands of something you wish to destroy completely, because the request for change transfers agency from you to that thing that receives your demands, and the very act of communication grants

it continued life. Our attacks aim to destroy authority, to open up spaces in order to recreate life, and to communicate with society (Schwarz in Schwarz et al, 2010, p. 193).

While the emotional outpouring of joy and rage associated with such insurrectionary tactics need not be privileged above all other approaches to direct action, it can be seen as part of the larger puzzle of mutual aid. In eschewing the lifelessness of mutual acquiescence, one can become receptive to the capacity for radical festivity associated with mutual aid, whether it takes the form of the creation of open assemblies, autonomous zones, squats, supermarket expropriations, pirate radio stations, TV station occupations, or torched cop cars. Both tactical and principled differences might still occur among anarchist strategists in relation to each of the above arenas of direct action, but by referencing the disempowering concept of mutual acquiescence we can challenge those socially constructed assumptions that can paralyze such action by playing upon our fears.

Beginning with Occupy Wall Street (OWS) on September 17, 2011, the spread of the Occupy Movement throughout North America both challenged mutual acquiescence in some ways and demonstrated the limits of liberalism in others. Many in the Occupy Movement have explained their involvement as an “awakening.” That metaphor is not just about personal revelation regarding the inequities of society, but refers to an awakening to the combined power of self-determination, mutual aid, spontaneity, and solidarity that often gushes forth when the bonds of mutual acquiescence are broken. Naturally, anarchists within

and without the Occupy Movement were critical of the liberal reformist discourse of many of the participants with its emphasis on corporate greed rather than outright opposition to capitalism, and such highly questionable Occupy Movement tropes as patriotism, citizen rights, celebrity endorsements, the populist fetishizing of democracy, the dogmatic use of the term non-violence at the expense of a diversity of tactics, and the simplistic idea that, to use OWS terminology, those people who are cops are part of the 99 percent without a corresponding recognition that when in uniform their job is to serve the interests of the 1 percent. Yet the Occupy Movement also opened up fluid spaces of possibility that had previously been locked down. In this regard, it acted as an umbrella site for prefigurative experimentation, a vehicle for the radical imagination to take flight, and a compass pointing in the direction of limitless horizons.

When thousands of rebellious people stormed Times Square, the Brooklyn Bridge, and Foley Square in New York City who never would have dreamed of doing so just a few months earlier, or when Occupy Oakland referred to itself as the Oakland Commune, shut down the ports, and mounted a successful general strike, the bonds of mutual acquiescence were temporarily broken as participants found themselves in a potentially anarchist moment and the collective imagination expanded exponentially. Now that the wave of the Occupy Movement has crested and fallen, the question remains as to whether future strategic occupations will become less like symbolic gatherings and more literally transgressive in relation to the institution of private property as was

briefly the case with the squatted buildings that sprung up in the wake of occupy camp evictions. Will permitted occupations increasingly give way to unpermitted ones? Will the momentum shift from asserting civil rights and liberties to practicing civil disobedience? Will civil disobedience morph into uncivil forms of disobedience that question state legitimacy? Will occupied spaces increasingly become bases of operations for an ever-widening and interweaving array of oppositional tactics and autonomous actions by rebellious individuals and groups? Will the tired politics of the liberal left co-opt any future movement that, like OWS, may steadfastly and uncompromisingly refuse to make demands of the powers that be, but may choose instead to satisfy their needs without intermediaries by means of direct action? Will any future consensus decision-making process be one that emphasizes robust participatory coordination efforts among heterogeneous affinity groups and empowered individuals rather than resorting to massified forms of pseudo-governance? Beyond all these specific questions, the overriding question is whether future uses of the occupation tactic will become safety-valves or instead act as launching pads for what Fredy Perlman called the “mutual invention of projects”(Nachalo, 1976, p.559).

From the start, the Occupy Movement involved both, and many anarchists involved in the creation and perpetuation of that movement gravitated to those groups of individuals that showed an affinity for direct action. On October 8, 2011, the Occupy Wall Street Direct Action Working Group stated in a call to action which was livestreamed via the internet from Washington Square Park in New York City.

The future of this movement lies in our commitment to create the world we want to live in: a world where people are not commodities; where attaching value to our natural environment doesn't lead to its destruction; a world without hierarchy and oppression; a world of mutual aid and solidarity; a world of self-determination and direct democracy within our communities; a world where foreclosures, empty buildings, abandoned schools, and parks are occupied by the people. Start in your own community and occupy your own spaces. Occupy everything!

While neither calling for anarchy per se nor using anarchist jargon (which is often not readily translatable to non-anarchists), the above statement can be read not only as a call to action, but as a refusal of the somnambulant netherworld of mutual acquiescence and its replacement with a lively vision of social change possibilities that contain the seeds of anarchy. The waves that broke over New York City in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy prompted many former OWS stalwarts to reimagine the radical nature of their activism in the midst of the tensions between mutual aid and charity embodied in the practical creation of the Occupy Hurricane Sandy relief effort. While the tide of the Occupy Movement may now have ebbed, time will tell when and where the next wave of mutual aid will break.

And looking backward across the water, the spark that ignited OWS was itself fanned by the flames of the Arab Spring and the subsequent occupation

of Madrid's Plaza de Sol by "los indignados" (the outraged) in May of 2011. Like OWS, while not strictly-speaking an anarchist or surrealist event, the Spanish encampment had elements of both. As participants wishing to "intervene in the reality of everyday life" by joining in the liberation of the public sphere, the Madrid Surrealist Group has written insightfully about the nature of that revolt (Madrid Surrealist Group in *Hydrolith 2*, 2014, p.44). As Eugenio Castro recreated the scene of the Plaza occupation: "Humor, eroticism, and imagination celebrated their betrothal here. Poetry had leapt out into the streets." Or as one of the ubiquitous Plaza signs proclaimed, "Closed for revolution, enjoy the inconvenience" (Castro in *Hydrolith 2*, p 56).

On the plaza of dreams, the ongoing revolutionary project of creating more poetic lives unfolded unimpeded for a while until it was strangled by a combination of the internal tentacles of bureaucracy and the hangman's noose of the police state. For a precious time, the plaza hosted a utopian project of the most surreal kind.

Utopian life was revealed as the revolutionary realization of the present, the abolition of time, the abolition of private property, the abolition of money and of use-value versus exchange-value, the reinvention of brotherhood and the re-enchantment of everyday life (Castro in *Hydrolith 2*, 2014, p.61).

The Madrid revolt had fostered an anarcho-surrealist experiment that sprouted up within the fertile flux of a more generalized popular uprising.

Similarly, at Istanbul's Gezi Park/Taksim Square

in November of 2011, the Turkish Surrealist Group participated in the occupation there, not as reformers but as revolutionaries. In the no holds-barred words of that Group, “The problem is how we will destroy the system rather than how we will survive in it” (Turkish Surrealist Group in *Hydrolith* 2, 2014, pp. 53–54). As Turkish surrealist Rafet Arsian explained in his first-hand account of the actions undertaken,

In the assurance of barricades, for eleven days Taksim Square and its surroundings changed into an open surrealist carnival. They’re searching for the life they’ve always dreamed of, against those who do not permit people to live their lives as they choose” (Arsian in *Hydrolith* 2, 2014, pp. 67–68).

And as Sol Lycantrophes further elaborated on this theme, “This experience is creating a new society just as it has raised a real city that is also a maze of desires” (Lycantrophes, *Hydrolith* 2, 2014 p.63). My point here is not to exaggerate the surrealist or revolutionary qualities of such occupations but to emphasize their potential to give participants a taste for a life worth living and to inspire future rebellions.

And beyond the occupation is the riot. Back in 1995, as the *banlieues* burned, the Paris Surrealist group put out a tract entitled *Warning Lights: A Surrealist Statement on the Recent Riots in France*, delineating the unrealized potential of such multi-racial uprisings in the inner suburban immigrant quarters to spread across the country. In this publication, the Paris Group dreamed out loud that the stark despair that initially fueled the riots could transform itself from a purely destructive

trigger for the cathartic enactment of localized rage into a concurrent vehicle for a deeper and more widespread rebellion. As they expressed it,

The rulers have been given a good hotfoot and have been forced to unmask themselves. Where the police abuse their powers, the state of emergency gives to their abuse the legitimacy that it lacks. In a flash, such warning lights have revealed the return of a possibility that seemed to be lost: that of throwing power into panic. From now on, we can imagine the strength of an uprising that would—beyond the inhabitants of the ghettos—include the whole population suffering from the rise of impoverishment, and would turn into civil war against the organs of capital and the state (Paris Group of the Surrealist Movement, 1995, pp. 2-3).

In this vision, the flames of the radical imaginary would be reignited on the barricades.

In this same incendiary spirit, the New York-based and surrealist-inspired revolutionary artists' group Black Mask, had earlier quoted André Breton's maxim: "authentic art goes hand-in-hand with revolutionary activity" in one of the group's initial theoretical statements, "Art and Revolution." The quote, which was supplied to them by Franklin Rosemont of the Chicago Surrealist Group, led them to urge artists to make an exodus from the galleries into the streets. In their confrontational 1967 "Wall Street is War Street" march, twenty five men in black wearing balaclavas and skull faces marching against capitalism and for "total revolution" projected a militant identity that can be

seen to have been a seminal influence on future radical street tactics. As art historian Gavin Grindon has acutely observed, “This was the first use of collective, masked-up black dress during a demonstration in an urban centre among Western social movements. As this style was combined with the tactics of breakaway groups, police confrontation, and property damage, the group anticipated, and perhaps indirectly influenced, the style and tactics of later “black bloc” groups which emerged en masse among 1980s German autonomen” (Grindon, 2015). As time went by, Black Mask would increasingly emphasize anarchist direct action tactics, renaming themselves the Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers in solidarity with the burgeoning black liberation movement of the times.

This brings us to the Ferguson uprising of 2014 in the States, which was kicked off by a deadly incident of police brutality in which Michael Brown was murdered by the forces of law and order. As CrimethInc has reported firsthand, the complexity of insurrectionary events there was played out in relation to an internal struggle for meaning that unfolded among the diverse participants in the uprising. In their words,

Liberal leaders and authoritarian groups have far and wide fought hard for control of the narrative in Ferguson. The recuperative power of the black left was in full effect, expressed via an array of tactics to discredit everyone who could not be reconciled with the state. Despite the forces arrayed against them, many people in Ferguson were determined to gain control of the streets, and pushed the would be managers

aside” (CrimethInc, 2015, p.77).

In contrast to the pacifying managerial narrative emanating from the accomodationist voices of those career activists and erstwhile reformers that sought to narrowly frame these events in civil rights terms; the Saint Louis Surrealist Group, in the tradition of not only the above *Warning Lights* diatribe, but of the Chicago Surrealist Group’s polemics on the Watts riots of 1965 and 1992, boldly proclaimed:

Our solution prescribes, among other things, the immediate dissolution of the police and other structures of authority, brutality, exploitation, and conformity, as well as the creation of cities of wonder where people of all races, ethnicities, genders, and other diverse affinities can mix in an environment of creative fecundity based on absolute freedom. (St. Louis Surrealist Group in *Hydrolith* 2, 2014,p.70).

Here was an inspired and inspirational negation of mutual acquiescence that at the same time affirmed an exhilarating vision of mutual aid.

The insurrectionary freedom of the riot can be both a freedom *to* take direct action against police repression by burning a cop car or engaging in an unmediated redistribution of wealth by looting, and a freedom *from* the illusion that fundamental change can come from within the system. The latter illusion acts as one of the bulwarks of mutual acquiescence. As Key MacFarlane has pointed out in relation to the Baltimore uprising of 2015, which was triggered by the street-level execution of Freddie Gray by the police, the “nothing to lose” stance of the rioters was a political flashpoint.

For those who side with it, it rules out the possibility of reform or progress under current structures of mediation. We don't want your shitty low-income apartments the fires say. We want to incinerate every last remnant of a dying generation—from the convenience stores where we give our money to a system that casts us aside, to the churches whose leaders tell us we have sinned. From the apartment buildings where we live, to the senior homes where we go to die. For so long we have paid the rich in complacency, and when we have not we have been shuttled off to prison—to smolder” (MacFarlane, “Rites of Passage, online 2015).

The flames of the riot are disconcerting not only to the powers that be but to their loyal opposition. By dismissing burning and looting as irrational and ineffective, the latter miss their incendiary importance in incinerating the debilitating illusions that buttress mutual acquiescence. Accordingly, they attribute such acts to the political naivete of the participants or circulate rumors of police infiltration rather than trying to understand them as indicators of radical refusal. As Scott Jay argues in deflecting the claim that most of those who engaged in the Baltimore riots were merely police agents provocateur,

There are black people all over the city throwing rocks at the police. We do not need to make up reasons why somebody would do this. The very concern that ‘peaceful protest’ is being ruined by people throwing things

is a completely backward approach to social struggles, usually pushed by liberals who really do want to keep protests symbolic for good media coverage and to appeal to the good nature of those in power (Jay, 2015).

Jay's article evidences a struggle about meaning in relation to rioting that is at once tactical and strategic. Anarchists tend to be concerned with fronting tactics that avoid re-legitimizing institutions of authority while strategically setting the stage for social revolution.

Outside of the context of the urban riot, when it comes to mobilizing against the ominous waves emanating from the melting of the Arctic ice caps and the explosions of offshore oil wells, mutual acquiescence keeps the forces of resistance at bay. As we witness species disappearing at an alarming rate, as we face ramped up state terrorism and a widening net of surveillance, and as the economy sinks into the tar sands of oblivion; mutual acquiescence allays our uneasiness. Alone-together in the welcoming arms of mutual acquiescence, many accept that they are disempowered to do anything meaningful about the rapidly deteriorating situation. In fact, many no longer even see it as a problem to be overcome, but a plight that must be endured or adapted to by self-managing their own despair. In order to more fully accomplish the feat of denying their own agency, they must assure themselves and one another that resistance is futile or even crazy. They are not only surrounded by but seek out relationships that do not question these authoritarian assumptions. At the social level, those considered to be, and who consider themselves to be, part of the

general public become increasingly accustomed to reluctantly accepting, unenthusiastically adjusting to, or even longing for the coming apocalypse rather than being inspired by the possibilities of a “coming insurrection” (The Invisible Committee, 2009) or desiring a “communion of revolt” (Anonymous, Institute for Experimental Freedom, 2009, p. 70). In this respect, mutual acquiescence can offer some insight into why and how it is that the general population can readily imagine an end of the world apocalypse scenario, but they cannot imagine anarchy.

Within relationships of mutual acquiescence, those cooperative acts of creation, refusal and insurrection, which each in their own way can undermine the ruling order of capitalist and statist assumptions, are forestalled, abandoned, ridiculed, or vilified as terrorism. Accordingly, instead of seeking the construction of relationships that resonate with what the author PM has referred to as a process of “substruction” (PM, 1995, pp. 58–60), in which subversion and construction go hand in hand; mutual acquiescence is characterized by an immersion in social relationships that demand varying degrees and kinds of acceptance and submission in return for peer approval and social harmony. Rather than experiencing the individual and collective uplift of affinity and solidarity in the anarchist sense, under the sway of mutual acquiescence we are urged to escape social isolation by forging the bonds of our own impotence rather than actively defending the sovereignty of the individual and/or group in opposition to the state.

As Hannah Arendt controversially pointed out with reference to the “final solution” in Nazi Germany,

many functionaries in the ranks of the Jewish leadership actively engaged in the self-administration of their own misery in collaboration with such bureaucrats of extermination as Adolf Eichmann. They did so because of their perception that resistance was impossible and so the most humane thing to be done under the circumstances was to collude in their own dehumanization so as to soften the blow as much as possible on the victims (Arendt, 1964). If, as Arendt has stated, bureaucracy is the “rule of Nobody,” then Eichmann’s willingness to follow orders in executing the laws of Germany was the mark of his own dehumanization as a pathetic cog in the faceless bureaucracy of a totalitarian system. It is my contention here, though never acknowledged as such by Arendt, that the opposite of such a totalitarian system is not liberal or social democracy, but anarchy.

Though our manacles in democratic regimes might be tricked-out with all the latest in eye-popping gadgetry, they may enslave us all the more because they can produce a technophobic torpor that can blind us to intriguing possibilities for direct action, sabotage, and revolt. In contrast to such passivity, a motley crew of hacktivists, Wikileaksers, and Luddites engage in various anti-authoritarian forms of resistance and pre-emptive attack which seek to challenge the commonsensical social underpinnings of webbed docility and complacency that are among the hegemonic links in the ideological chain of mutual acquiescence. During the salad days of the Occupy Movement, Guy Fawkes was the internet joker in the stacked deck of the capitalist state whose image was meant to incite the players to break the bank. Though that image was successfully used in OWS propaganda to

rally the troops, the real test of such culture jamming strategies continues to be what those gathered together under any banner actually do to foment an uprising. With the Occupy Movement, the results were so muddled that one might easily forget that the historical Guy Fawkes sought to blow up parliament rather than to reform it.

The book *Desert* emphasizes another alternative, “active disillusionment” (anonymous, 2011, p. 7). Faced with the reality of environmental devastation and the perceived improbability of global revolution as a corrective, those who favor a strategy of active disillusionment eschew both what they consider to be the naivete of false hope and the cynicism of inactive despair. Such a strategy instead posits that the abandonment of messianic revolutionary illusions need not be disabling. Even considering oneself to be a nihilist does not preclude mutual aid and/or anarchist resistance based on a “non-servile humility” that seeks to attack or outwit the state even if it cannot abolish it. This strategy has long been employed by indigenous people in their ongoing struggles against the genocidal ravages of colonialism.

In essence, *Desert* places Landauer’s notion of “behaving differently” in the context of anti-authoritarian resistance. In doing so, it notes: “In many places we are ‘behaving differently’ by spreading love and cooperation AND resisting and/or avoiding those who would be our masters” (Anonymous, *Desert*, 2011, p. 68). One stateless anti-authoritarian land-based strategy involving the creation of secessionist “permanent subsistence zones” has been called “insurrectionary subsistence.” To clarify,

The simple proposal is this: a widespread insurgency, based on a multitude of local rebellions, each one demanding enough land to sustain its inhabitants. More specifically, occupying or re-occupying territory with the explicit view that it becomes our habitat”(Seaweed, 2014,p. 8).

Such an approach has similarities to what James C. Scott has called in a Southeast Asian context, “the art of not being governed” (Scott, 2009).

Instead of thinking of the State as a *thing* to be seized in a vanguardist sense in order to counter ideological domination from above, as in the formulations of Marxist cultural hegemony theorist Antonio Gramsci, anarchists do not seek to replace one form of hegemony with another (Day, 2005). Instead, we challenge the social processes that constitute mutual acquiescence by practicing direct action from the bottom-up. In so doing, we oppose the passive acceptance of consensus reality with both open and covert forms of solidarity and rebellion that are based upon our individual predilections and shared affinities, and these direct actions can in turn release the inherent power of mutual aid in its most anarchic sense. While the above analysis is not meant to deny the existence of ideological hegemony (no need to throw the Gramscian baby out with the bathwater), it is based on the anti-authoritarian assumption that such hegemony takes many diverse forms beyond orthodox Marxist notions of class and culture as base and superstructure respectively. Further, it maintains that the only way in which the dominant reality can be undermined is from below.

Demystifying Reality

As history has shown, the destruction of the alienated relationships upon which the State is built remains complicated by the fact that mutual acquiescence has a continuing appeal. When faced with the varied uncertainties and dislocations of life on the sinking ship of capitalism, mutual acquiescence offers those with queasy stomachs a “tough love” seasickness remedy that normalizes “survival of the fittest” competition as a lifeboat strategy, while dismissing the cooperativeness of mutual aid as unrealistic. The resulting prescription of competition for scarce resources in the face of calamity is combined with an emphasis on only those specific options for action that will not seriously rock the authoritarian boat any further, much less sink it. Moreover, the human impulse toward mutual aid is further suffocated by a combination of our everyday internalization of domination and those in the debrainin industry who ignore such a routinization of disempowerment and professionally proselytize on behalf of an apolitical positivist psychology. The latter’s emphasis on blaming ourselves for our own alienation and oppression is then reinforced by our everyday relationships of mutual acquiescence in which we are constantly encouraged to “be realistic,” get with the program, stop whining, pop an anti-depressant if necessary, and for godsake appear upbeat.

Today, a touchy-feely New (w)Age form of positive thinking has joined forces with the callous Social Darwinist philosophy of rugged individualism. Both urge us to survive by prioritizing the competitive

elements within our human nature repertoire. For example, by seeking to become an entrepreneur, one can attempt to secure a first class waterproof compartment in turbulent seas, hoping to keep the sharks at bay for a while by feeding the less privileged to them, or at least by giving one's tacit consent to that sacrificial slaughter. If such a macabre scenario seems a bit too distasteful, we are encouraged to stop being so negative and accept this impoverished version of social reality as a given. The underlying assumption is that we are powerless to save them anyway and that the leaks will eventually be patched up enough so that those who are "naturally selected" can sail out of troubled waters before it becomes too late.

As the successful entrepreneurs and their professional cohorts in business and government watch the gruesome show from their watertight bunkers, they lament the negative thinking and lack of initiative on the part of those who are shark bait, since, after all, anyone could obtain a dry berth if only they would pull themselves up by their own flipperstraps. Such a sink or swim ultimatum is socially lubricated by relationships of mutual acquiescence, which encourage us to adopt this dog-eat-dog mentality by bathing its harshness in the soft glow of positivity or the dazzling promise of fifteen minutes of fame on the *Survivor* show. We acquiesce by seeking a privileged status and blaming those, including ourselves, who are drowning for being weighed down by their own "bad attitudes" or "karmic debt." On the other hand, mutual aid relies on autonomous self-determination and radical forms of solidarity to overthrow the entire system of privilege that has proven

to be so perilous to our individual and collective safety in the first place.

In order to maintain legitimacy, the current incarnation of the democratic capitalist state links its strategies of integration not to the lockstep conformity of the faceless masses, but with miserabilist versions of “individualism.” The desire for individuality morphs into a contemporary version of success in which the old Horatio Alger mythology of upward mobility is replaced by the spectacular celebrityhood of YouTube, or the “God Wants You To Be Rich” prosperity gospel preached by televangelistic “pastorpreneurs,” motivational speakers, life coaches, and corporate trainers. Given the underlying assumption of equality in a democratic context, those who are deemed “failures” can only blame themselves because of their lack of fortitude, self esteem, intelligence, or imagination. They have not learned “The Secret” of creating their own reality (Ehrenreich, 2009). This feeding frenzy of victim-blaming is in turn socially enforced by relationships of mutual acquiescence. Accordingly, those labeled failures are considered to be the enemies of their own “happiness” as defined by the kind of commodified success that is measured in consumer goods and fleeting fantasies of celebrity status that simultaneously define the good life and confine our imaginal lives.

The problem then is not the sharks in the water, since they are only doing what comes naturally to their species, but the kind of predatory society in which some privileged humans are encouraged to throw those who are more vulnerable overboard and hide their eyes or watch the sport as if there was no other choice. As a result, whether we find ourselves drowning in dangerous

waters, or endlessly treading water in the doldrums of alienation, mutual acquiescence reinforces the social acceptance of a very circumscribed set of options. In reactionary fashion, such paltry alternatives are restricted to either the threat of drowning or the promise of the socially acceptable lifejacket of competitive survival as a reward. In either case, we are expected to psychologically buy into the rules of the game in such a way that if we are winners, it is at the expense of those who might otherwise be seen as comrades, and if we are losers, we are set adrift in a sea of fear and uncertainty.

However, as Rebecca Solnit meticulously documents in her book, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, time and again, when faced with the breakdown of the social order as a result of natural disasters (like earthquakes) or technological collapse (as is the case with “blackouts”), a contradiction appears. On the one hand, there are always some well documented incidents of selfish opportunism, but the less publicized of these involve the aggressive military response of elites whose underlying panic is about the disruption of the social order that grants them their legitimacy. In the latter case, the public is viewed as an unruly mob to be either controlled by force or else made physically and psychologically dependent on the institutionalized charity delivered by corporate benevolence or the welfare state. On the other hand, however, in the vast majority of instances, a scenario of solidarity emerges that she characterizes as a “disaster utopia” of social engagement and community-mindedness where forms of self-organization are created amidst disaster that involve heroism, purposefulness, compassion, generosity and the unleashing of altruism,

desire, transcendence, possibility and agency.

There is more to the disaster picture than the immobilizing despair experienced by the outside observer witnessing the media spectacle of victimization. When mutual aid is set in motion, exhilaration, or even elation, can be experienced at a visceral level in disaster situations, along with the transcendent realization that it is the alienation of “normal” life that is the real disaster. In this moment of intensity, disaster can take on the radical liminality of a temporary autonomous zone, carnival, or revolution. As Solnit explains,

It’s anarchic, a joy that the ordinary arrangements have fallen to pieces—but anarchic in that the ordinary arrangements structure and contain our lives and minds; when they cease to do so, we are free to improvise, discover, change, evolve” (Solnit, 2009, p. 117).

And this kind of collective evolution is based upon mutual aid rather than being reduced to an individualized version of survival of the fittest.

In such extraordinary situations, it is my contention that mutual acquiescence is temporarily suspended, and in its place spontaneously arise those latent and suppressed cooperative aspects of human nature that culminate in acts of mutual aid that often go beyond mere survival. In such disastrous times, we witness and experience collaborative forms of direct action springing up from the ruins and can participate in the fabrication of a society built on free association. These disaster utopias are not aberrations of human

nature. Rather, they are affirmations of what is most anarchic about it. As she concludes, “In finding a deep connection with one another, people also found a sense of power, the power to do without the government, to replace its functions, and to resist it in many ways” (Solnit, 2009, p. 144).

From a similar communitarian anarchist perspective, John Clark expands upon Solnit’s “disaster utopia” argument in his participant observer analysis of the anarchist response to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. For Clark, the Katrina disaster engendered several responses. One was the intensification of opportunities for economic exploitation he places under the rubric of what celebrity journalist Naomi Klein has famously termed “disaster capitalism.” However, beyond even such ruthless economic opportunism, Clark calls our attention to the simultaneous increase in repression, brutality, and ethnic cleansing that he refers to as “disaster fascism.” Yet, as he sees it, the storm also created the conditions for mutual aid, solidarity, and communal cooperation that he terms “disaster anarchism.” For Clark, the latter represents the positive and hopeful side of the experience, culminating in the reemergence and flourishing of a variety of voluntary forms of grassroots community action that value both community and individual needs to create what he calls a “communal individuality” (Clark, 2013, p. 61). As the latter term implies, while Clark has strongly criticized Stirner in the past (Clark, 1976), he does not consider himself to be an enemy of individuality in Landauer’s communitarian sense of the term. Moreover, if we

take the liberty of combining Solnit's emphasis on an affirmative catastrophe-based anarchy with what she might otherwise view as a negative insurrectionary perspective, we can understand part of the appeal of a street-level resistance tactic like a black bloc as involving a destructive/creative dynamic a la Bakunin in response to the individual and social numbing engendered by the overwhelmingly catastrophic reality of everyday life. In surrealist terms, such a response can be understood as one way of combating the miserabilism at the heart of mutual acquiescence by unleashing the radical imagination and the unrestricted flow of mutual aid in the dancing flames of uncontrollable rebellion.

When social calamity or upheaval strikes, we are not alone. We encounter others in a similar situation who may either seek to survive at our expense or else join together to build relationships based upon cooperation which suddenly seem possible when the walls of mutual acquiescence come tumbling down. However, though the anarchist trace is never completely absent from them, not all cooperative relationships create anarchy in practice. The proclivity for mutual aid, which Kropotkin illuminated as being an aspect of human nature that is essential to the survival of the human species, can instead be channeled into the mutual acquiescence of reformism, where it is systematically degraded and stripped of its anarchist potential. In appealing to those who cringe at the conservative survival of the fittest strategy but who find the anarchy of mutual aid to be a bit too frightening or "unrealistic," mutual acquiescence offers the liberal

alternative of reform.

Instead of battling for survival against one's peers in Hobbesian fashion or (perish the thought) collectively engaging in autonomous direct action, the reformist version of mutual acquiescence urges us to put our faith in requesting/demanding legalistic remedies from the State or participating in the electoral politics charade by rallying around such hackneyed Obamaesque advertising slogans as "change you can trust." Radical change is considered (if it is considered at all) to be impossible anyway, and we are instead directed to take a seat on the bandwagon of mediated dissent. Both spectacular society and mutual acquiescence are based upon social relations between people that are rooted in passivity. When taken in tandem, they can reinforce one another in undermining the formation of relations of mutual aid, even among self-identified dissenters, as being "unrealistic."

How then might we subvert "realism"? While many radicals are familiar with the imaginative forms of counter-cultural action undertaken by the Dutch provos in the Sixties (Van Riemsdijk, 2013), the Orange Alternative's subversive cultural resistance tactics emanating from Poland in the Eighties are less well known. The Orange Alternative was a popular uprising that specifically used the marker of surrealism to subvert the spectacle of Soviet bloc communism. It existed simultaneously with the more internationally well-known Polish oppositional movement named Solidarity. Unlike the latter's "serious-minded" workerist opposition, the Orange Alternative's playfully subversive "socialist surrealism," as they called it, was engaged in

anarchic forms of direct cultural action. In the city of Wroclaw, when the official censors covered up anti-government graffiti (including but not limited to that of Solidarity) with white paint, the surrealist pranksters of the Orange Alternative painted a dwarf (sometimes translated as elf) on every white patch on the wall to both mark the spots where the graffiti had been and to provide a new symbol of resistance that was meant to undermine the authority of the communist regime with black humor much as the provos had once done in their own way with the figure of the “kabouter”(or gnome in English). In the Orange Alternative’s surrealist parody of Marxist dialectical materialism, Orange surrealist provocateur, “Major” Frydrych contended, with tongue firmly in cheek, that these actions embodied “important dialectical art, where the slogan was the thesis, the patch the antithesis, and the dwarf the synthesis” (Frydrych/Grinden, 2014, p. 100).

In this way, the government’s attempt to erase the telltale traces of public disturbance was countered by a mischievous prank that, through its ubiquitous appearances in the streets, became as important a symbol of the resistance as the Guy Fawkes mask later became to the Occupy Movement when it went viral in the internet years. In the historical decade of the Orange Alternative, owning a computer was obviously not possible, yet its gestures of resistance became the talk of Poland. What’s more, anyone with a can of paint could join in the fun. The youthful rebels of the Alternative were in this way, able to creatively use the subversive power of laughter to undermine the authority of the communist state by poking serious fun at its futile

attempts to stifle dissent.

In Orange's carnivalesque approach to rebellion, street theatre, happenings, underground newspapers, and pirate radio utilized satire, ridicule, and absurdity as the weapons of choice for outflanking the powers that be in what Padriac Kenney has called an "Elfin Rebellion." It also included a pre-Yes Man form of parody in which "instead of refusing to ape official ideology, it was more effective to ape it grotesquely" (Kenney, 2002, p. 159). Instead of confronting the police by fighting in the streets, one Orange action involved singing, dancing, and throwing flowers at the police, not as a pacifist invocation of universal love, but as an exaggerated gesture of contempt. It was obvious to everyone that the flower throwers were anti-police, but the cops could hardly arrest them under the circumstances without themselves appearing in a bad light. In such ways, the Orange Alternative to the imposed reality of Soviet domination "symbolized a kind of surreal immunity from repression through foolishness" (Kenney, 2002, p. 160).

Similarly, on the seventieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, a wildly successful Orange Alternative happening occurred. It was a send-up of the official sanctity of the Great Proletarian October Revolution and was simultaneously staged in the streets as a mock celebration of Soviet history with the implicit understanding that everyone knew the Russians were, in fact, hated as an occupying army. As Major Frydrych reported on the proceedings:

Socialist surrealism in full display. Shouts of
'RE-VO-LU-TION.' The Proletariat emerges

from the bus; on their shirts are signs reading: 'I will work more,' and 'Tomorrow will be better' (Frydrych in Kenney, 2002, p. 162).

Everyone got the joke! In their "Manifesto of Socialist Surrealism," the Orange Alternative explained the basis of their preference for the creative tactics of the unfettered imagination: "Imagination means a world without limits. The realist's career consists in the murder of the winged imagination. Such a bird can be cooked for dinner" (Frydrych/Grindon, 2014, p. 302). It was just such a Stalinist wall of unimaginative realism that surrealist progenitor André Breton had once confronted in his short-lived, turbulent, and mutually unsatisfactory attempt to find common ground between the surrealist movement and the Communist Party before returning to the anarchist first principles that had originally animated his politics. Nevertheless, fifty years later, a Polish version of Stalinism was shattered in part by the surrealist tactics of the Orange Alternative.

Rather than accepting the spectacular relations of mutual acquiescence, the Orange Alternative actively provided a non-acquiescent way of satisfying the human proclivity for mutual aid using the mad laughter of surrealism to hijack the spectacle itself. As Giorgio Agamben has posited, the spectacle's allure is based on the expropriation of the human desire for community.

This is why (precisely because what is being expropriated is the very possibility of a common good) the violence of the spectacle is so destructive; but for the same reason the spectacle retains something like a positive possibility that can be used against it (Agamben, 1993, p. 79).

Why not then replace a community of acquiescence with a community of resistance? While such high-flying terms as “hijinks” and “hijacks” may not be related in the etymological sense, they are related in the poetically transgressive surrealist sense.

Of course, the degree to which it is possible to unproblematically engage in resistance to the spectacle by using it against itself without having those efforts recuperated, or rebranded, is debatable (Duncombe, 2007 and Holmes, 2008). Such efforts to *détourn* the spectacle, and in so doing unleash the communitarian aspects captured by it, are always in danger of being channeled into the safety-valve relationships of mutual acquiescence that characterize reformism. In engaging with the democratic spectacle of reform, liberals accept acquiescent roles by confining their political zeal to becoming, at the most, civil disobedients or, at the least, “concerned citizens.”

The former acknowledge state power by willingly going to jail in order to make their point about the unjust laws that they have intentionally broken. The latter continue to grant the state its legitimacy by writing a letter to a government official; electing or applauding the appointment of a new charismatic leader to follow down the garden path of “green capitalism;” asserting their *rights*, or petitioning the powers-that-be for redress of their grievances. Increasingly, those citizen activists who possess the most naïve sense of entitlement are immersing themselves in evermore technologically mediated forms of online communication that can be easily monitored by any government that might deem their activities to be subversive in spite of their repeated pro-

fessions of loyalty to their country.

In terms of the broader question of technological mediation per se, Annie Le Brun, avid surrealist defender of the ecology of the imagination, has written a devastating critique of the paving over of the convulsive power of the Marvelous by what she considers to be the deadening virtuality of the networked society. In her polemic, *The Reality Overload: The Modern World's Assault on the Imaginal Realm*, she states,

Even as it launches ambush after ambush upon the unreality of our desires, there is nothing 'virtual' about this reality. In fact it is overflowing, a reality overload, coming to besiege us at the very depths of our being (LeBrun, 2000/2008, p. 4).

In essence, she contends that we are faced with "a reality that has almost succeeded in making us confuse the virtual and the imaginary" (LeBrun, 2000/2008, p. 68). Increasingly, we normalize the perniciousness of the digital human interface and reimagine reality itself as the repository of interactions that are networked and documentable online. Even those who would not go as far as she does in totally dismissing any radical potential that might be available within the virtual realm might still find it instructive to question the relationship between virtuality and mutual acquiescence.

How many of us are imprisoned in the closed logic of a computer rationality in which appearances are not merely displayed on the screen as simulations of experience, but have become the experience itself? To what extent have we lost our bearings in what is predominantly a cyberspace sea of ersatz realizations of

our most radical desires? To what degree has the desire for empowered solidarity upon which mutual aid is built been debased and co-opted by the fan club mentality of the ubiquitous social networking sites that so often act as contemporary vehicles for a mutual acquiescence in which your identity is a form of property that can be assessed by calculating the number of your Facebook “friends.” As CrimethInc has it:

The networks offered by Facebook aren’t new; what’s new is that they seem external to us. We’ve always had social networks, but no one could use them to sell advertisements—nor were they so easy to map. Now they appear as something we have to consult.

Accordingly, CrimethInc has urged us to question our enclosure within the digital utopia (CrimethInc, *Digitized Capitalism*, p. 1).

For green anarchist Kevin Tucker, such digital enclosure creates a “suffocating void.” From his perspective, social media represent more than merely a new technological platform for social networking or social activism. They constitute a self-referential and self-absorbed “Interface Revolution.” As he explains

Nothing in our reality really is anymore. We are a herd of individuals vying for attention in a sea of selfies, tweets, and yelps[...] Our distraction keeps us from seeing the monumental change taking place: the immersion into a constantly connected, but never grounded social network. We are, so to speak, ‘always on.’ Smart phones, tablets, screens everywhere we look, wireless signals pervading nearly all spaces, check ins,

GPS and monitoring equipment constantly reassuring the world that we are here and we are consuming this manufactured reality... This is the dream of every domesticator: people lining up and fighting for the latest technology, paying top dollar for devices with built-in tracking and data mining software and willing to remain in debt to sustain the terms of our bondage (Tucker, 2015, pp.12-13).

What makes Tucker's disturbing picture of the banal details of this alienated reality so chilling is the typically enthusiastic consumerist acquiescence to the alienation and surveillance upon which it is predicated.

Franco "Bifo" Berardi traces contemporary forms of alienation to an "overdose of reality" and an infocratic regime whose power is built upon the creation of an "overloaded" cognitive space in which attention itself is under siege. Going beyond a reliance on the Freudian concept of psychological repression of desire in investigating the cause of alienation, he explains our current malaise as being related to the forms of "over-communication" that characterize the psychologically disaggregating milieu of digital connectivity. Within the context of the Infosphere, he explores the schizophrenia-inducing environment of intense velocity, over-inclusivity, hyper-expressivity, and excessive visibility that characterize semiocapitalism. These are the flows that can engender panic and encourage dependence on those institutions of authority that offer to provide shelter from the storm in a process that is characterized by what Peter Lamborn Wilson has referred to alternately as "technopathocracy"

and “technolatry” (Wilson, #6 and #9).

In the activist milieu, the ultimate irony is that though the internet may be strategically used with mutual aid in mind to accomplish subversive purposes with varying degrees of success in specific cases, the overall result may still involve the perpetuation of mutual acquiescence because of the way in which the more human-scale forms of communication of the past are now digitally mediated. As Berardi explains, the velocity of semiotic proliferation unleashed by digital simulation is so extreme that all circuits of collective sensibility end up being saturated” (Berardi, 2009, p. 162). Increasingly, as the digital age unfolds, our desires for what we lack are not repressed. Rather, they are subjected to a multiplicity of digitally simulated realizations whose hyper-accelerated availability produces an overwhelming situation in which our capacity for imagination atrophies or disappears and the creative potential of desire implodes.

Beyond the pervasiveness of such dematerialized relations of virtuality, another overloaded aspect of mutual acquiescence is related to the material nature of personal identity in the democratic capitalist state. Here, the ownership of property is one of the defining factors in a “successful” or “unsuccessful” personal identity. In any authoritarian society, even one that chooses to call itself “democratic,” law and order is policed not just by cops, but also by an undercurrent of intertwined relationships of mutual acquiescence that in effect govern daily life. Some of these relationships are codified into law in a way that reveals the ghost within the machine. When I first formulated a rudimentary version

Coda

It has been my contention in this book that the anarchist practice of mutual aid allows us to simultaneously challenge the inevitability of a particular social reality and embrace our most radical desires even in the face of a pervasive web of social relationships built upon mutual acquiescence. The many voices of mutual acquiescence ring in our ears daily urging us to dismiss these desires as unattainable, to deny them as unrealistic, or to redirect them toward the surface glitter of consumerism and the dead end promises of a moribund politics. By breaking loose from the chains of mutual acquiescence and relating to one another differently in a freely improvised and effervescent spirit of mutual aid, we open the door to possibility.



— Sheila Nopper

Conclusion

Dream and revolution were not meant to exclude one another but to harmonize together. To dream the revolution is not to renounce it but to make it in a double sense and without reservations. To thwart the inevitable is not to flee life, but to throw oneself totally and irrevocably into it.

Paris Surrealist Group,
“Inaugural Rupture.” (1947)

What would it take to make our dreams of anarchy emerge into the light of day? Rather than revolting, we have often been acquiescent. Whether we are locked securely in the gilded cages of consumerism, or are bouncing around contentedly in a technological bubble of recuperation; we are increasingly rendered inert. Whether our desires succumb to the invisible bars of surveillance, the humiliations of self-policing, or to the murderously visible truncheons of police brutality; we are increasingly intimidated. We may tell each other that we are free, but deep down we know that we are lying to ourselves while urging others to join us in the paralyzing fears and comforting delusions that feed our acquiescence. If we rebel, we often place reformist limits on our rebellion in the name of realism instead of inspiring each other to pursue our dreams of breaking loose.

Whether we cast off the chains of mutual acquiescence among friends and accomplices or in larger rebel groupings, breaking loose and mutual aid tend to go hand in hand. Relations of mutual aid can reinforce our individual refusals, and together we can create unmapped zones of inspiration where we are

encouraged to keep the wrecking ball of resistance rolling merrily along in the direction of creating anarchy. Rather than playing the immobilizing game of waiting for technological innovation to save us or expecting a revolutionary messiah to come forth who will lead the faithful to a heaven on earth, inspirational acts of revolt can sustain us in the upheaval of the here and now and spur us on to future revolutionary endeavors. As individuals in revolt, we can unleash the flow of the transformational process immediately by liberating the occupied zones of our imaginations. The more of us that participate in imaginative individual acts of rebellion or undertake radical forms of action in conjunction with those to whom we are passionately attracted or with whom we feel an affinity, the more we may inspire the spread of the rebellious spirit among others.

As CrimethInc has pointed out in this regard, though the resultant tactical shifts and the escalation of militancy may at first be invisible, the full extent of their dimensions may only become apparent over time. In a communiqué from 2015, they note,

Over the past seven years, we have seen a slow, steady escalation in the tactics that protesters in the United States feel entitled to employ. In 2008 and 2009, only the most radical student groups went so far as to occupy universities; in 2011, Occupy became the watchword of an entire mass movement. During the Occupy Movement, only the most radical groups went so far as to blockade anything; during the Black Lives Matter protests of November and December 2014, people around the United States employed blockading on a regular basis. During the protests that spread from Ferguson in 2014, only

the most enraged participants engaged in vandalism, arson, and looting; yet protesters in Baltimore escalated to vandalism, arson, and looting as soon as their demonstrations escaped police control. All this illustrates the value of pushing the envelope; demonstrating new tactics, however unpopular they may be at the time, so that they enter the public imagination for future use (CrimethInc, 2015).

As staging areas for breaking loose, such inspired actions have the potential to be the meeting place of the individual and the social in that the desired result will be mutually reinforcing and one acts as a catalyst for the other. If these actions involve creative responses to uncommodified desire, we have won the first battle in the ongoing war on the imagination. In such moments of anarchic release, we spontaneously seek the crossroads where destruction and construction intersect, where radical negation can shake hands with radical affirmation, however tentatively; where the cathartic power of social rupture embraces the visionary power of the imagination. It is often at such liminal crossroads that what I call inspiration zones can be found.

One such contemporary inspiration zone of a communitarian nature, La ZAD, has attracted many anarchists to its call for accomplices in recent years. The ZAD or Zone À Défendre (Zone to Defend) is a large occupied protest camp located in the French countryside amidst four thousand acres of forest, farmland, and marshes. La ZAD exists as a hodgepodge of old squatted farms and fields, DIY strawbale houses, naturally-built mud roundhouses, fanciful treehouses, and cabins built with recycled materials. Aside from its heterodox housing stock, La ZAD has included permaculture farms,

organic bakeries, bike workshops, beehives, communal kitchens, a micro-brewery, a mobile library, and a pirate radio station, Radio Klaxon, within its illegalist environs.

La ZAD is located at the site that the Vinci corporation has targeted for the building of a second airport for the nearby city of Nantes with government endorsement. Vinci is a multinational construction firm that specializes in nuclear power plants, uranium mines, oil pipelines, highways, and carparks. Their airport project would accelerate climate change, entail the loss of massive wetlands, and displace local farmers. Using a diversity of tactics to counter this corporate onslaught, the ZADists have erected barricades to defend the land and themselves against armed assaults by the authorities, including the police murder of ZADist defender Remi Fraisse that precipitated a retaliatory riot in Nantes in the Fall of 2014. In their war with the bulldozers, the ZADists have continuously built and rebuilt their community directly in the path of the development and made strategic alliances with local farmers in opposition to the construction of an airport on their land.

Moreover, some ZADists have engaged in the fine art of imaginal warfare by making up a surreal list of impossible demands that ridicule the limited notions of possibility that confine the parameters of mainstream political debate. In terms of the latter list of demands, the reformist call for negotiations after the November 2012 clashes between ZADists and the police in the countryside led some of the land defenders to improvise a playful utopian response à la Fourier at his most outrageous. In similar fashion to surrealist Alain Joubert's concept of "critical utopianism," the "active myth of utopia" is used to critically analyze the present state of the world by comparison rather than utopia being

conceived of as a closed blueprint for social change (Joubert, 2015).

A sympathetic description of La ZAD summarized one such response to reformist pressures in the following manner.

It had twenty-one ‘non-exhaustive, open demands,’ these included: the closing of all companies with more than twelve employees, a lifetime’s income for all workers, twenty hours of sunshine in winter, nuclear energy replaced by ministers’ pedaling, Élysée [president’s residence] transformed into a wetland, [Minister of the Interior] Valls and all members of the ministry of defense and interior to get ‘fuck the cops’ tattooed on their foreheads, pipelines to be used only for transporting fruit juice, sixty acres of land to be given to everyone who has ever lived on La ZAD, and the final demand ‘that all negotiations be made illegal’—perfectly rounding off this fitting response to the farce of democracy, whose ‘dialogue’ is not about resolving a problem but simply an exercise in saving face whilst continuing business as usual (Laboratory of the Insurrectionary Imagination, 2013).

Of course, all ZADists might not have agreed with these demands,” but that is not the point. While there have been internal differences within La ZAD as it has attempted the inspirational work-in-progress of creating unity in diversity, this adventurous community of resistance to “the airport and its world” has maintained its precarious existence in spite of repeated attempts by the cops to suppress and dismantle it.

Related to the exciting collective struggle

for land and liberty that has unfolded at La ZAD, but closer to where I live in so-called British Columbia, is a community of indigenous resistance fielded by the Unist'ot'en clan in response to the voracious appetite of the colonial megamachine. The Unist'ot'en strategy has gathered a diverse crew of land defenders from near and far, including many anarchists who have been welcomed to their besieged camp that is located in unceded territory. Not only have resisters built a cabin right in the way of several proposed pipelines, but according to journalist Michael Toldano,

Outside the cabin, a community thrives in the pipelines' paths. A permaculture garden, a solar-powered electric grid, a bunkhouse, elders' trailers, campgrounds, a root cellar, a traditional Wet'suwet'en pithouse, and a two-story healing center with an industrial kitchen and counseling space have all been built with crowd-sourced funds and volunteer labor (Toldano, 2015).

The Unist'ot'en have never relinquished their territories to Canada by way of treaty, sale, or surrender of land and do not recognize or honor provincial or federal permits or the governments that issue them. That their camp lies directly in the proposed path of several resource extraction projects involving the construction of pipelines to carry tar sands oil and fracked liquid natural gas to the West Coast has made it ground zero in the Unist'ot'en's defense of their traditional ways. Consequently, the camp has fortified its perimeter with heavy chains and barbed wire; installed an emergency siren, two-way radios and scanners; and treated the bridge leading into their camp as an international border that requires their permission to cross. Steadfastly

refusing compliance with the authorities in the face of ongoing harassment, surveillance, and intimidation tactics by the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), it has offered inspiration to all those fighting climate change at a global level. In this inspirational sense, La ZAD and the Unist'ot'en camp have much in common, though the latter is steeped in an indigenous worldview and the former in a more European counter-cultural one.

Moreover, reiterating a point well made by the Invisible Committee in comparing the indigenous struggles of the Zapatistas to other such revolts against neo-liberalism (including La ZAD), the forces involved are not engaged in purely local struggles. Though the terrain of battle is localized, these struggles exude a “war of worlds” ethos that counters the perpetual crisis management/state of emergency/anti-terrorist/counter-insurgency initiatives of governmental control in a google-eyed cybernetic age of endless apocalypse and perpetual surveillance with a land-based corporeal *presence* that is rooted in the visceral art of nurturing revolutionary becomings.

In regard to such struggles, which offer a variety of “openings for other ways of living” that are not mired in the pacification and helpless servitude of mutual acquiescence, the Invisible Committee posits,

What ties them together are the acts of resistance they give rise to—blockage, occupation, riot, sabotage as direct attacks against the production of value through the circulation of information and commodities. The power they generate is not something to be mobilized *with a view to* victory, but victory itself, to the extent that, little by little, the power grows (Invisible Committee, 2014, p.22).

Part and parcel of such victories are the rich qualitative encounters produced within them. Such situational relationships of mutual aid are capable of generating resounding waves of community and a spirit of self-creation whose spontaneous flows elude the outreach nets of multitude-minded movement managers, the banal formalities of committee bureaucrats, the quantitative mentality of assembly-line pollsters, and the distracting rights-based democratic rhetoric of citizen indignation and civil society alike.

Beyond such rural land defense camps, inspiration zones can also appear in the everyday process of living one's life in more urban situations. New York City is my hometown, though I haven't lived there for many years. Back in December of 2012, an upsetting incident that occurred in the New York City subway system set me to thinking about where we humans are headed as a species. In that instance, a man ended up on the tracks in the path of an oncoming train. Bystanders on the platform, instead of acting to rescue him, whipped out their smart-phones and cameras to record the event for their Facebook pages. The disposable digital camera posts that have increasingly replaced real time relationships based upon mutual aid with a superficial Facebook connectedness have caused in-depth cooperative interactions to suffer a profound loss. Likewise, our human affinity for the directly-lived experience of mutual aid has of late become eerily entombed in an obsession with more mediated forms of representation and documentation online. It seems that our mutual aid instincts have become so atrophied that we only want a desensitized picture of the pain because actual physical contact or emotional engagement is too messy. We are increasingly out of touch with ourselves and each other.

That 2012 subway incident caused me to recall a haunting encounter from the period when I still lived in New York City. During that time, I witnessed a similarly distressing situation in the bowels of the subway system. It was 3 a.m. on a weekday morning. I was waiting for a train on my way home to Brooklyn at an empty lower Manhattan station that had several sets of platforms, each with its own stairway down from the upper entrance level. Looking across the lines of tracks while waiting for my train, I saw an apparently drunken man, who had been tottering along on the farthest platform, inadvertently stumble onto the tracks below. Without a moment's hesitation, I was in motion, running up and down stairways at full speed to get to the spot where he had fallen. When I arrived, the mixture of fear and hope in his eyes was palpable. Hearing the sound of the oncoming train, now audible from the tunnel as it approached the station, further exacerbated the intensity of the situation. I quickly reached down to grab his upturned hand, pulling him onto the platform just before the train swept into the station. Aware that I had saved him from certain death, he kissed my hand with tears of gratitude rolling down his cheeks.

Sitting him down safely on a nearby bench, I returned to my own platform to catch a train back home. At the time, I distinctly remember feeling wide-awake and brilliantly alive, whereas previous to my encounter with him, I had been sleepy and somewhat despondent. In a certain sense, it was he who had saved me. I had been rescued from the despair of an atomized existence. The natural human capacity for mutual aid had kicked in, and I had taken direct action. It was not a gesture of heroism on my part, but an inherent act of human solidarity. My spontaneous action was not based

on an abstract altruism or a condescending *noblesse oblige*, but upon a firsthand connection of my own intrinsic desire for self determination as an individual to the life and death struggle of a stranger in trouble. I did not seek to be a savior. Many suicides in New York City involve people who consciously decide to jump onto the train tracks. I had seen that he was staggering and assumed that he was likely to be drunk or ill. Yet it was only when he raised his hand toward mine that I knew for sure that he was not intending to commit suicide, and it became clear that if I had not made the effort to run over there posthaste then he would have surely died.

This latter incident illuminates the challenges involved in breaking loose from mutual acquiescence since such a break often implies the choice of taking action or not in a crisis situation where one often does not have all the facts immediately at hand or the luxury of a leisurely amount of time in which to think about one's actions in advance of having to make a decision. Acting in accord with the social passivity that characterizes relationships of mutual acquiescence might have inclined me to automatically assume that he sought suicide or that it was too late to save him anyway and that I should not waste my efforts, but the impulse toward mutual aid brought me to my feet running just in case I was able to offer my assistance before an unintended fatality occurred. In retrospect, the epiphany I experienced that night, one that has been a constant source of reverie for me over the years, occurred immediately upon my arrival on the scene. It manifested itself at the moment when I peered down onto the tracks expecting to see the face of a stranger, but instead saw myself looking back up at me.



— Alex Januário



— Alex Januário

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What I have termed “mutual acquiescence” is the social adhesive that cements the bricks of alienation and oppression that structure our daily lives into a wall of domination known as consensus reality. Mutual acquiescence is a major obstacle to the practice of anarchist “mutual aid” in that the latter is concerned with providing the cooperative means for vaulting that wall.



With that in mind, I take the liberty here of referring to the concept of mutual aid only in the fullest anarchist sense, and will consider those cooperative human relationships associated with welfare state capitalism and state socialism as being built upon forms of mutual acquiescence because of their implicit or explicit statist assumptions, which run counter to anarchy.

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